

Empowering Rape Survivors Trauma and Recovery in the novel, Alaisri

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled, “Empowering Rape Survivors: Trauma and Recovery in the novel, Alaishri” is the outcome of an investigation carried out by Ansumwi Boro, Roll No- PGENG408A22003, for the partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts in English offered by the Department of English, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, Assam during 4th semester M.A course 2021-2023. The work has been done under my supervisor and guidance, and this work has not been submitted anywhere for the award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this Dissertation “Empowering Rape Survivors: Trauma and Recovery in the novel, Alaisri” is my own original work conducted under the Supervision of Dr. Debajyoti Biswas. To the best of my knowledge and ability, this dissertation does not contain any part of any other work that has been submitted for any degree to this university or institute. The committed authors have been given proper credits.

Signature of the candidate

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Lastly, I take full responsibility for any grammatical or typographical errors and any other mistakes in this text. I apologize for any unintentional inaccuracies.

Ansumwi Boro

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ABSTRACT-

Rape is a traumatic experience that has profound effects on its victims. The aim of this dissertation is to learn about how people who have experienced rape can find positives in their lives afterwards. Even though rape is a terrible experience, some survivors manage to grow stronger because of it. This study can help us better support survivors and help them find hope and strength after such a difficult experience. It also explores the societal factors that often compound the trauma, such as victim blaming, stigmatization, and the justice system's complexities. It seeks to contribute to a deeper challenges faced by rape victims and to inform the development of more compassionate and effective strategies for their healing and reintegration into society. '*Alaisri*' is a mentionable Bodo novel written by Manaranjan Lahary in which the plot and the character portray the realistic life of the society. A university girl, Alaisri was raped on her way back to home from university. She has been suffering from trauma for a long period of time, making it hard for her to feel safe and happy again. The storm and darkness affected her life but nevertheless she struggled to fight against anti-social aspects. As a consequence, Alaisri reveals the formative abilities of women. Thus, this dissertation delves into the multifaceted ways in which the novel portrays how we understand and support rape victims in their journey towards healing and empowerment.

KEYWORDS: Rape survivor, empowerment, trauma, recovery, sexual assault, education

CHAPTER-1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Rape can really hurt women a lot, both in their bodies and their feelings. It can hurt them physically by causing injuries, infections, and even making them pregnant when they don't want to be. It can also make them feel really bad inside, like they're always worried or sad. Sometimes they feel really scared and have bad memories that won't go away. They might feel like it's all their fault and that they're not strong.

But even with all that bad stuff, many women who've been raped are really strong. They can get better with help and time. They can start feeling like they have control over their lives again and that they're valuable. Some of them even become really brave and speak up about what happened to them. They might want to make sure it doesn't happen to other people. Others just focus on taking care of themselves, making good relationships, and figuring out who they are beyond what happened to them.

It's not easy for them to get better, but they can become even stronger and kinder after going through something so awful. They're really brave for not giving up, and they deserve a lot of respect for that.

When something really bad like rape happens to someone, it's normal to feel really upset and scared. But even though it's hard, it's important for the person who was hurt to stay strong. That means not letting the bad thing take over their whole life. It's okay to cry and feel sad, but it's also important to remember that they're not alone and that there are people who can help them feel better.

Coming forward to talk about what happened and fighting for their rights might feel really scary, but it's also really brave. By speaking up, they're not only helping themselves but also standing up against something wrong. It's like saying, "I won't let this bad thing control me, and I want to make sure it doesn't happen to anyone else."

It's not easy, but being brave and speaking out can lead to making things better, not just for themselves but for others too. And that's something to be really proud of.

Within the pages of literature, we can find a strong way to help and understand others. This dissertation is all about looking at how stories in novels can help people who have been hurt by sexual assault. By studying *'Alaisri'*, I want to explore more about how the protagonist who has been through tough times find her way to feel better and stronger. Alaisri is a really strong girl. One can tell just by looking at her. She has a lot of inner strength that shows on the outside too. When things get tough, she don't give up easily. She keep going and don't let anything bring her down. It's like she has a powerful force inside her that helps her face challenges head-on. Everyone can see how strong Alaisri is, and it's really impressive.

Looking at the novel *'Alaisri'* gives us a great way to understand how trauma affects people and how they get better. By following the character or the protagonist, named Alaisri, we can see all the hard feelings and problems faced after being raped. Manaranjan Lahary shows us how tough things can be, but also how strong survivors are as they work to feel better and take back control of their lives. The incident took place during Bodoland Movement, a prominent political and social endeavor in Assam, Northeast India, has spanned multiple decades. Its primary objective is to secure a distinct state for the Bodo community, a substantial ethnic group in the area. The Bodoland movement has evolved through various phases, beginning with a period of political awakening, progressing through armed struggle,

and culminating in the establishment of the Bodoland Territorial Council. During this movement, many women, especially from the Bodo community, experienced terrible acts like rape and violence. The Bhumka gang rape case was one of the worst incidents. Women in the movement faced lots of difficulties and felt scared and vulnerable. They still played a big part in fighting for Bodoland, even though their rights were often violated. The perpetrator exploited the tumult of the Bodoland movement to perpetrate abhorrent acts of rape. Mihir's daughter, Alaisri was frank, straightforward, outspoken, well-disciplined, and had a clean heart, who dreamed of becoming an IPS officer like Kiran Bedi. To pursue this dream, she chose English as her honors subject during her BA studies. However, she was raped near old Titaguri Block Office by Malen, the son of Badal, who took advantage of her being alone. After raping her, he left behind his packet, spectacles, and diary unknowingly. He thought she was dead as she was unconscious, and he was caught through the diary he left. A meeting was held between the two villages, New Titaguri and Old Titaguri. Alaisri, without anybody's consent, made the shocking decision that Malen should marry her; otherwise, she would marry him. She made the strong decision to break his target, not by the punishment given by the law or the court, but by binding him to marital life, despite having made her body impure, and still dreaming of roaming freely and raping other females. It's a challenge for her against patriarchy, which perceives women as weak. If we observe closely, we can see that Alaisri has two hidden aims and objectives for marrying Malen: one is to administer punishment to the rapist, and the other is to demonstrate that women are not weak. Because most rapists aim to avoid marrying a girl or woman who has been raped, these women are often neglected by society. Alaisri already knows that the imprint of a woman's wound from being raped never fades; it doesn't disappear, even with attempts to remove it. Manaranjan Lahary expressed this sentiment by quoting Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare's play, saying, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand, oh, oh, oh!" One can cleanse dirt from the skin by

using soap and scrubbing with cloth, but how does one remove the ash that has entered the body after being raped? She is a strong girl despite the harsh incident and never thought about staying and crying over being raped. Instead, she came forward with a strong decision, as we learned from the statement she told her close friend Rosie: "I will fight to the last." As a result, she emerged victorious in her battle, fighting as a strong woman.

Manaranjan Lahary was a well-known in Bodo literature as a novelist, poet, dramatist, editor, scholar, professor, critic, translator, and writer. He was born in 1936 at Bamunkura village under Kokrajhar district. His literary contribution to Bodo literature is unparalleled. He has made significant contributions to Bodo literature through his literary work in several genres such as novel, short story, poem, play, prose, and critique. He completed his Master Degree in English from Gauhati University in 1971 and also passed B.T.(B.Ed) in 1972. He was a guest lecturer in the department of Bodo at Gauhati University, Kokrajhar Campus from 1999 to till his death on 29th July 2009. His novels typically portray various aspects of society including its culture, economy, ethnicity, religion, and the problems faced by women.

In this dissertation, I am going to break down the main ideas, how the characters change, and narrative techniques employed within '*Alaisri*', shedding light on the ways in which literature can both reflect and shape societal perceptions of sexual assault and its survivors. By looking closely at how the novel talks about trauma, strength, and getting stronger and how stories can make us care more, understand better, and speak up for survivors.

As we journey through the pages of '*Alaisri*' guided by the experience of the character, we are reminded how crucial it is to make survivors' voices are heard, to fight against the shame, and to push for a society where everyone impacted by sexual violence feels supported and empowered. Through the exploration of trauma and recovery in the

novel, I hope to help people understand more about what survivors go through and to encourage positive changes in how we think about and help survivors, both in stories and in real life.

1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Alaisri," a Bodo novel penned by Marananjan Lahary in 2003, depicts the harrowing experience of a college-going girl who becomes a victim of rape amidst the tumultuous backdrop of the Bodoland movement. This narrative serves as a poignant portrayal of the resilience and empowerment demonstrated by the protagonist, Alaisri, as she navigates through the aftermath of the trauma she endured.

Despite the novel's significance, it remains untranslated and largely unacknowledged in academic discourse. Dr. Swarna Prabha Chwinary, in her book "Bodo Solomani Bizirnay: A Critical Approach on Few Boro Novels," delves into textual analysis, shedding light on the concise temporal scope of the story, spanning merely six to seven months. The focal point revolves around the interplay between two villages and two families, primarily emphasizing the journey of Alaisri, Mihir's elder daughter, and Malen, the youngest son of Badal.

Initially set in Kokrajhar College, the narrative unfolds with Alaisri brimming with aspirations and joy. However, the storyline takes a grim turn as she faces the brutality of rape, leading to a transformative journey marked by resilience and fortitude. Lahary intricately divides the narrative into 19 segments, each illuminating Alaisri's courageous and indomitable spirit.

From the anxious wait of Alaisri's parents as darkness descends to the poignant conclusion at Badal's homestead, the story encapsulates a spectrum of emotions and experiences. Despite

the trials and tribulations, Alaisri's unwavering resolve shines through, as she continues to harbor dreams of a brighter future, symbolizing hope amidst adversity.

In essence, "Alaisri" not only portrays the individual struggle of its protagonist but also serves as a testament to the enduring human spirit in the face of trauma and injustice. Chwinary posits that "Alaisri" might possess a socio-political undertone, particularly in its portrayal of the Bodoland movement. Consequently, the characters within the novel appear flat rather than rounded, lacking the multidimensional complexity typically associated with well-developed literary personas. Chwinary draws a striking parallel between Marananjan Lahary's novel "Alaisri" and the Bollywood film "Raja Ki Ayengi Barat," released in 1997, starring actress Rani Mukherjee. In both narratives, there exists a poignant moment where the protagonist, akin to Rani Mukherjee's character, vocalizes a sentiment of disillusionment regarding the efficacy of legal punishment for the perpetrators of rape. This sentiment is expressed by Alaisri during a village meeting, mirroring a similar scene in the film where Rani Mukherjee's character articulates a similar sentiment.

Furthermore, Chwinary highlights thematic similarities between the two works, noting instances of familial conflict and persecution experienced by the protagonists. Just as Rani Mukherjee's character faces mistreatment from her sister-in-law in the film, Alaisri endures similar torment in Lahary's novel.

Chwinary suggests that Lahary's inspiration for "Alaisri" may have stemmed from viewing "Raja Ki Ayengi Barat," given the striking resemblances between the two narratives. However, as a writer, Lahary exercised creative license by altering certain aspects of the storyline. While the film depicts a courtroom judgment, Lahary opted to frame a crucial scene within the context of a village meeting held at the residence of the rapists, fostering dialogue and confrontation between inhabitants of the two villages.

In essence, Chwinary's analysis underscores the interconnectedness of literature and popular culture, highlighting how Lahary's novel draws inspiration from cinematic themes and motifs while imbuing the narrative with its unique cultural and social commentary.

In the journal "Manaranjan Lahary ni Soloma: Nwjwr arw Songjirnai" from the Department of Bodo at Bodoland University, Dr. Bijitgiri Basumatary's article "'Alaisri' Solomayao Berkhangnai Boro Aijw: Mwnse Bijirnai" delves into the valor of Alaisri as emblematic of the Bodo woman's spirit. Dr. Basumatary examines the thoughts, endeavors, aspirations, and hopes of women, concluding that Bodo women have attained education and wisdom, standing equal to men in contemporary society. He emphasizes the necessity for freedom and rights for women, urging the youth, maidens, and women to step forward and make resolute decisions to improve society with courage.

Dr. Basumatary's analysis advocates for the emergence of numerous Alaisris, whose collective strength and determination can drive societal progress and inspire women to achieve empowerment.

In "Alaisri," Lahary's invocation of Lady Macbeth's famous line, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand, oh, oh, oh!" serves to underscore themes of guilt, the inescapability of one's actions, and the profound psychological impact of wrongdoing. This reference is laden with deep thematic significance, drawing a poignant parallel between the overwhelming guilt and psychological torment experienced by Lady Macbeth and that of Lahary's characters. The symbolism of cleanliness and corruption inherent in the line highlights the permanence of moral stains, suggesting that no amount of external efforts can cleanse the inner sense of guilt. By employing this powerful Shakespearean imagery, Lahary adds layers of emotional and psychological complexity to his narrative, evoking a sense of tragedy and depth. This intertextual dialogue enriches the text, allowing readers familiar with

Shakespeare to appreciate the nuanced echoes and thematic continuities between the two works, thereby deepening their understanding of Lahary's characters and themes. Ultimately, this literary reference enhances the narrative's resonance, connecting the emotional turmoil of Lahary's characters with the rich literary tradition of Shakespeare.

"Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky! Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

[...]

Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!"

In Shakespeare's play "Macbeth," the line "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" is spoken by Lady Macbeth in Act 5, Scene 1, during the famous sleepwalking scene that underscores her profound psychological breakdown and overwhelming guilt over the murders she has been complicit in. Initially, after Macbeth murders King Duncan to seize the throne, Lady Macbeth is the stronger, more resolute partner, urging Macbeth to commit the crime and helping to cover it up. However, as the play progresses, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are increasingly consumed by guilt and paranoia. By Act 5, the psychological toll of their actions becomes unbearable for Lady Macbeth. She begins to sleepwalk and is observed by a gentlewoman and a doctor. During her sleepwalking, she relives the night of Duncan's murder and desperately tries to wash imaginary bloodstains from her hands, lamenting that "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." This line reveals Lady Macbeth's realization that no physical act can cleanse her of the moral and psychological stain of her involvement in the murders. The bloodstains symbolize her guilt, and her inability to remove them signifies the permanence of her remorse and the

psychological consequences of her actions. When Lahary invokes this line in "Alaishri," he draws a parallel to a similar incident or theme in his novel. A character in "Alaishri" likely experiences a comparable sense of guilt and psychological torment, unable to escape the consequences of their actions. The reference to Lady Macbeth's line suggests a profound and inescapable remorse, highlighting the emotional and moral complexity of Lahary's character, much like Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

The dissertation employed the theoretical framework of reader response theory, which is a literary perspective highlighting the reader's pivotal role in interpreting and constructing meaning within a given context. It contends that meaning doesn't solely derive from the author's intentions or the text itself, but rather emerges through the active engagement of individual readers. Reader response theory posits that readers bring their unique experiences, beliefs, and values to the reading experience, shaping their understanding and interpretation of the text. It acknowledges the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of readers, underscoring that they may interpret and respond to a text in varied ways. The theory asserts that the meaning of a text isn't fixed or objective, but rather subjective, contingent upon the reader's personal and cultural context. It emphasizes the active participation of readers in meaning-making and highlights the significance of their emotional and intellectual responses to the text. Originating in the 1960s and 1970s, reader response theory emerged in opposition to formalist and structuralist approaches, which primarily focused on the text or author's intentions. Notable figures associated with this theory include Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, and Stanley Fish. Its impact extends to literary criticism, enriching our comprehension

of how readers interact with texts, encouraging exploration of diverse readings and perspectives. The dissertation drew upon secondary sources such as books, journals, poems, etc.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This dissertation includes following aims and objectives.

Aims:

1. To Investigate the diverse needs of rape survivors post-assault, including emotional, legal, and psychological support.
2. To examine existing literature and research on the empowerment of rape survivors from psychological, legal, and social perspectives.
3. To assess the effectiveness of various empowerment strategies and interventions designed to support and empower rape survivors.
4. To explore the challenges and barriers encountered by rape survivors when accessing support services and resources for empowerment.
5. To investigate how societal attitudes, stigma, and cultural factors influence the experiences of rape survivors and their empowerment processes.
6. To identify best practices and innovative approaches for empowering rape survivors.

Objectives:

1. To conduct a comprehensive review of literature focusing on the psychological, social, and legal aspects of rape and empowerment.
2. To conduct qualitative interviews or surveys with rape survivors to gain insights into their experiences, needs, and preferences regarding empowerment.

3. To analyze the influence of societal attitudes, cultural norms, and systemic factors on the empowerment experiences of rape survivors, drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives.
4. To identify key challenges and barriers faced by rape survivors in accessing support services and resources for empowerment, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods.
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing empowerment programs and interventions through systematic analysis of empirical studies and case studies.
6. To explore innovative approaches and promising practices in empowering rape survivors.

CHAPTER-2

Understanding the experience of rape: Psychological and Societal impacts

Rape is a very serious thing that violates people's rights. It happens when someone is forced into sexual acts without agreeing to them. Women who survive rape need help with many different things. They need support that focuses on them and their culture. They also need help with things like understanding the law, taking care of themselves, and finding support. Survivors often struggle to get the help they need, especially medical help after the assault.

Socio-cultural Needs: Survivors also face problems because of how society sees them. They might be rejected by their families and communities because of the stigma around rape. This makes their trauma worse. People in society often believe that being raped or having sex before marriage makes a person impure. They may ignore or ostracize girls who have experienced this, as if they've lost the purity of their bodies. Similarly, Alaisri had to face these problems. They think that no one will want to marry a girl who is no longer a virgin. But it's not the victim's fault for no longer being a virgin; it's the fault of society for neglecting those victims instead of punishing the rapists. Alaisri, without any hesitation, stepped forward and announced her strong decision to marry Malen in front of the villagers at a meeting. She believed this would be a fitting punishment for him, ensuring he could no longer roam freely and harm others. She declared, "The perpetrator who violated me and shattered my life, the one who drained the essence from blossoming flowers and left wilted, must marry me. If he refuses, I will pursue him relentlessly; indeed, I myself will marry him. This is my final decision, and I will not budge from this decision again." (Page No. 110) In the end, the villagers had to concede to her decision. Despite some initial reservations about

its correctness, Alaisri's bravery and self-esteem persuaded everyone to agree. Only she truly understood her pain, and no one could fathom the depth of her suffering. That's why they endorsed her decision and supported her. With no alternative, Malen found himself compelled to marry her under the pressure of the villagers. The quote from Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" highlights how those in power who oppress others cannot use their power to free themselves or the oppressed. Only when the oppressed realize their own strength, despite being seen as weak by society, can they liberate both themselves and those who oppress them.

The study in Iran found that the way society sees men and women, with men often seen as powerful and women as submissive, makes it easier for violence against women to happen. This creates a big need for support from society to change these ideas about gender and to help survivors of violence. When survivors are blamed by others or feel guilty themselves, it makes their situation even worse. The way society treats survivors, with things like rejection or even honor killings in extreme cases, can make them feel even more isolated. In some places, if a woman is raped, she might be looked down upon or rejected by her husband, family, or the community. In very serious situations, like in some parts of Afghanistan or Palestine, the woman might even be killed by her own family to protect their reputation, because in those places, a woman's behavior is closely tied to her family's honor. Bach suggested that we need to improve society's understanding of these issues through education and research, and make better plans to help survivors.

Educational Needs: Women who have survived rape need to learn about their rights and how to take care of themselves after the assault. This knowledge can help them deal with the challenges they face. Brown identified several key areas of information needs for women survivors of rape, encompassing legal guidance, police procedures, health resources, and community support. Among these, concerns regarding sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

and pregnancy prevention were prominent. Additionally, survivors often sought insight into the circumstances surrounding their assault, aiming to incorporate these experiences into their personal narrative. Recognizing the transformative potential of education and knowledge, empowering survivors to prioritize self-care and expedite their recovery process. Kirkner highlighted the importance of post-rape self-care education, while Basile underscored the imperative for healthcare providers to empower survivors and mitigate post-trauma complications.

Psychological Support: Many survivors also struggle with their mental health because of the stigma around rape. They might feel guilty or ashamed, which can lead to conditions like PTSD or depression. It's important to help them understand that what happened is not their fault and support them as they heal. Women who have survived rape often need to talk to friends and feel heard, express their feelings without judgment, and receive sympathy. According to Campbell and colleagues, many survivors found it helpful to talk about their experience in supportive conversations, which aided their healing process. Ahrens and Campbell demonstrated that friends who understand psychological principles can positively influence survivors. Another study showed that survivors seek understanding and support from friends without fear of criticism. These survivors often struggle with low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions, increasing their risk of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), highlighting the importance of accessible psychological services. Huemmer and colleagues noted that survivors often keep their assault secret due to negative emotions like self-blame, fear, and stress. Many survivors find it difficult to confide in their spouses and family members, facing challenges in communicating their experiences and seeking support. Akbari and colleagues emphasized the need for survivors to build strong relationships with their families through improved communication skills to overcome the negative impacts of their experiences.

Gender Equality and Support: Changing how society thinks about gender and blaming the perpetrators instead of the survivors are also important. This can help survivors feel stronger and more supported.

Ethical Research Practices: When researchers study sexual assault survivors, they need to do it in a way that respects them and their experiences. This means being careful and thoughtful about how they gather information.

To help survivors of rape, we need to look at everything they need: support from society, education about their rights, help with their mental health, and changing how we think about gender. By doing these things, we can create a safe and supportive environment where survivors can heal and recover.

Rape is a profoundly traumatic experience that affects survivors on multiple levels, including psychologically and socially. The ramifications of rape are complex and far-reaching, often leading to enduring consequences that affect every aspect of a survivor's life. Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing effective support systems, interventions, and policies.

Psychological Impacts

1. Trauma and PTSD:

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Many rape survivors experience ASD shortly after the assault, characterized by severe anxiety, dissociation, and intrusive thoughts. When these symptoms persist beyond a month, they may develop into PTSD. PTSD symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the assault. After the incident, when Alaisri's mother went to sleep, Alaisri started thinking about the rape from beginning to end. All the scenes flashed

back to her mind—she was practicing badminton for college week with her friend Rosie and was late returning home. She usually returned home at three, but it soon became four. She then bid farewell to her friend and headed home. Rosie called her back to return the bag she had left behind.

Alaisri started speeding on her bicycle after she crossed the railway crossing. Darkness surrounded her when she reached Pagla Baba temple. No vehicles were present anymore. It became even darker when she reached Titaguri market. Only a few CRPF vehicles were around. She could see someone wearing sunglasses and a jacket riding towards her by the light of the CRPF vehicle's headlights.

The boy riding at speed collided with her, and he fell from his bike. She struggled, pushing him to get rid of him, but he forcefully took her to his bike and drove towards the Titaguri Block Department Office. The rapist shut off his motorcycle, put it on a stand, and took her to a room. She cried louder and louder, hoping someone would rescue her. But he embraced her tightly, took both her hands to her back, and laid her on the floor. Then he tore off all her clothes, one after another, and then he raped her.

Suddenly, she screamed loudly, waking both her parents, who rushed to her and asked what had happened. Alaisri hesitated to reply and simply said that nothing had happened to her, then started crying. Recalling all the bad memories of the incident, she began to cry a lot. She overthought about how she, a once-blooming flower, could have a future after being raped. The rapist had taken all her purity, her youth, her respect, her character, her good name in college, and her clear hope for society. With these thoughts, she started crying like an infant.

Hyperarousal and Hypervigilance: Survivors often experience heightened states of arousal, leading to increased anxiety, startle responses, and difficulty sleeping. This hypervigilance is a protective mechanism but can significantly impair daily functioning. Alaisri faced difficulty sleeping after the incident. She overthought about her life incessantly. She questioned her future, wondering why she should care for a body that now seemed hopeless. Her dreams for the future were shattered by that horrific night.

A gardener sows the seeds; the sapling grows and matures into a beautiful plant. The plant blooms into a lovely flower, but one insect bites the flower, marring its beauty. She once loved looking at herself in the mirror, but now she avoids it entirely.

2. Emotional and Cognitive Responses:

Depression: The sense of loss, helplessness, and hopelessness following rape can lead to severe depressive episodes. Feelings of worthlessness, lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities, and persistent sadness are common. Alaisri was consumed by despair over how to continue living. She was tormented by thoughts of how she would face her college peers, what the principal and professors would think of her. Her dreams of becoming an IAS or IPS officer were shattered by the incident. She had aspired to complete her degree in English Honors, but all her hard work had been rendered futile. She viewed herself as impure, a person tarnished in the eyes of society, like someone half-devoured by a beast. In her anguish, she lamented her fate.

Anxiety Disorders: Beyond PTSD, survivors may develop other anxiety disorders, including panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and social anxiety disorder. These conditions further complicate the survivor's ability to function in social and occupational

settings. Alaisri trembled as her heart weakened under the weight of numerous distressing thoughts, which we might call nightmares. She began to dread her condition, worrying about the possibility of pregnancy and the horrifying thought of carrying the rapist's child. She feared the impact on her family's reputation. Should life become unbearable, would she consider suicide? Yet, she reminded herself that suicide is a sin. Priests teach that human life is a gift of fate, bestowed by God alone, who has the sole authority to give or take it. No one else has the right or ability to create or end life. These reflections left her feeling cold. She then lay on her bed and became unconscious.

Self-Blame and Guilt: Many survivors struggle with intense feelings of self-blame and guilt, often internalizing the myth that they somehow provoked the assault. This can hinder the healing process and contribute to long-term psychological distress. Alaisri began lamenting her fate to Rosie during their conversation when Rosie came to check on her condition. When Rosie blamed herself for not allowing Alaisri to return home early and for making her practice for long hours, Alaisri responded, "No, Rosie, it's not your fault. If it was written in fate, no matter the day or night, danger can come at any time, my friend." She felt ashamed and did not want to continue her studies, thinking of herself as impure. She questioned why this had happened to her and hesitated to participate in the competition after the incident.

Cognitive Distortions: Rape can lead to distorted thinking patterns, such as overgeneralization (believing that because one person hurt them, others will too) and catastrophizing (expecting the worst outcomes in situations). This can be substantiated through a conversation between Alaisri and Rosie. Alaisri says, "My perception of men is irrevocably tarnished. They are all ravenous, avaricious, and toxic. They view women merely as vessels to satiate their desires, to provide carnal pleasure to their insatiable bodies, and to

bestow immense gratification to their souls, bodies, and hearts. They see women as the nectar of sweet indulgences in clubs, cafes, hotels, bars, and restaurants. In their eyes, women have only two roles: to fulfill their lust and to bear children, thereby increasing the family count. Just as a deer's meat is its own enemy, a woman's body is her enemy.

3. Behavioral Changes:

Avoidance: To cope with the trauma, survivors might avoid places, people, or activities that remind them of the assault. This avoidance can lead to significant social withdrawal and isolation. Alaisri decided to quit attending college and withdraw from the competition. She was also ashamed to show her "unlucky" face to her principal and professors.

Substance Abuse: Some survivors turn to alcohol or drugs to numb the emotional pain and trauma. This maladaptive coping mechanism can lead to substance dependence and further complicate recovery. Alaisri was not seen taking such initiatives, like becoming addicted to drugs. However, there are some survivors who make such decisions in an attempt to forget all the pain.

Self-Harm and Suicidality: In severe cases, the overwhelming emotional pain can lead to self-harming behaviors or suicidal ideation. It's crucial for survivors exhibiting these signs to receive immediate professional help. Alaisri trembled as her heart weakened under the weight of numerous distressing thoughts, akin to nightmares. She began to dread her condition, fearing the possibility of pregnancy and the horrifying thought of carrying the rapist's child. She worried about the impact on her family's reputation. Would she consider suicide if life became unbearable? However, she reminded herself that suicide is a sin. Priests teach that human life is a gift of fate, bestowed by God alone, who has the sole authority to

give or take it. No one else has the right or ability to create or end life. These reflections left her feeling cold. Eventually, she lay on her bed and lost consciousness.

4. Societal Impacts

1. Stigmatization and Victim-Blaming:

Cultural Attitudes: Societal attitudes toward rape can greatly influence a survivor's experience. In many cultures, there is a tendency to blame the victim rather than the perpetrator. Questions about what the victim was wearing, their behavior, or their sobriety are often used to shift responsibility.

Internalization of Blame: Victim-blaming attitudes can lead survivors to internalize guilt and shame, making it harder for them to seek help and share their experiences.

2. Legal and Institutional Barriers:

Reporting and Justice: Many survivors face significant barriers when reporting rape to authorities. Fear of not being believed, re-traumatization during the legal process, and the low conviction rates for rapists contribute to this hesitancy.

Institutional Responses: Institutions, including workplaces, educational settings, and law enforcement, may not provide adequate support. Survivors often encounter insensitivity, disbelief, or outright hostility, which can deter them from pursuing justice and support.

3. Impact on Relationships:

Interpersonal Relationships: Rape can severely impact a survivor's ability to form and maintain relationships. Trust issues, fear of intimacy, and communication difficulties can

strain friendships, family bonds, and romantic partnerships. Alaisri doesn't have a lover, so she doesn't face issues of trust. However, some victims must endure this challenge instead of receiving support during their difficulties.

Support Networks: The response of friends and family members can significantly influence a survivor's recovery. Supportive and validating responses can aid healing, while disbelief or minimization can exacerbate trauma. Alaisri was supported by her parents, who reassured her not to worry and that everything would be all right. She also had supportive relatives and villagers. Her best friend Rosie motivated her, saying, "Your thoughts are misguided, Aale. Why do you dwell so deeply on this incident? There may be students who have endured worse or committed graver mistakes. Yet, they didn't abandon their studies. Perhaps they don't overthink it and continue attending college regularly." Rosie added, "I tell you, Aal, your future career is not destroyed and will not be destroyed. You are blaming yourself because of the sorrow in your heart."

4. Economic and Occupational Consequences:

Job Performance: The psychological aftermath of rape can impair a survivor's ability to concentrate, perform tasks, and interact with colleagues, potentially leading to job loss or demotion.

Financial Instability: The combined effects of mental health challenges, medical costs, and potential job loss can lead to financial instability, further compounding the survivor's stress and anxiety.

5. Public Health and Policy Implications:

Healthcare Costs: The physical and psychological consequences of rape necessitate substantial medical and mental health care, contributing to increased healthcare costs.

Policy Development: Effective policies are essential for preventing rape, supporting survivors, and prosecuting offenders. Public awareness campaigns, comprehensive sex education, and legal reforms are critical components of a societal response to rape.

The experience of rape inflicts profound psychological and societal impacts on survivors. Understanding these effects is essential for providing effective support and developing interventions that facilitate recovery. Addressing the stigma, improving legal responses, and fostering supportive environments can help mitigate the long-term consequences of rape and empower survivors on their path to healing. By acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted impacts of rape, society can move towards a more empathetic and just approach to supporting survivors and preventing future assaults.

During The Lagos State Scout Council's 1st Youth Engagement and Diversity Forum on March 31, 2018, Oyetade Elizabeth Modupe delivered a lecture on "Rape and Its Effects on Society." Below are excerpts from her presentation.

The National Survey on Violence Against Children (VAC) in Nigeria identifies three types of VAC: physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional violence. Among these, sexual violence is the most prevalent, affecting the highest number of children in Nigeria. Many respondents indicated they would report such violence to the police, emphasizing that as messengers of peace, we must actively combat this menace. Rape, although often considered a low priority within communities, inflicts severe physical, mental, and emotional harm on its victims.

Rape is defined as a type of sexual assault that involves non-consensual carnal knowledge, often executed through physical force, coercion, abuse of authority, or targeting individuals incapable of valid consent, such as those unconscious, incapacitated, or below the legal age of consent. The term rape is frequently used interchangeably with sexual assault. It is crucial to address this issue globally, where it often lacks the necessary attention and efforts to fight the bias against rape victims.

For instance, on July 22, 2012, Cynthia Osokogwu, a postgraduate student at Nasarawa State University and a clothing retailer, was murdered in Lagos by acquaintances she met on Facebook. They lured her to a hotel in FESTAC Town, drugged, raped, and subsequently killed her. Similarly, five undergraduates from Abia State University conspired to rape a young woman, ignoring her pleas for mercy. The video of this incident sparked national outrage, yet no substantial progress has been made in the investigation. In India, a 23-year-old paramedical student was gang-raped, mauled, and left to die in the streets of Delhi, igniting widespread condemnation and international attention.

The effects of rape on victims are manifold, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional trauma. Physically, victims may face unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and damage to reproductive organs, especially in children or young teens. Additionally, they often endure beatings and torture, which can sometimes be fatal. Psychologically, victims suffer from trauma and paranoia, leading to social withdrawal and fear of interacting with others, particularly men. They may also experience self-pity, self-blame, and suicidal tendencies, exacerbated by societal stigma and lack of support.

The community's response to rape significantly impacts the victim's recovery. In developed countries, communities typically provide emotional support and help victims overcome their trauma. However, in many parts of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, victims

often face neglect, lack of justice, and social ostracism. These societies may blame the victim, viewing her as an outcast and depriving her of the necessary care and support. Cultural attitudes in conservative societies like India contribute to this issue, where rape victims fear being labeled and often do not report the crime.

It is imperative to demand changes worldwide to address such injustices. Educating and informing the public, encouraging discussions, and shifting societal attitudes towards rape are essential steps to eradicate this intolerable social issue.

The alarming rise in the intensity and frequency of rapes and attempted sexual assaults on women, compounded by numerous unreported cases, is a critical issue in countries like India. In 2018, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported a staggering statistic: one rape occurring every 15 minutes. On some days, the number of reported rapes reached as high as 91. This troubling situation urgently demands the attention of researchers to investigate the underlying factors contributing to such crimes. Reshma J. K., Punnya M. Pillai, Peekka Rajevi, Sreecutty C. R., Eslavath Rajkumar, Allen Joshua George, and R. Greeshma, all affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the Central University of Karnataka in Kalaburagi, India, articulated the following in their scholarly article 'Socio-cultural and psychological aspects of rape: Perspectives of young men from Kerala'. This study looked at why men commit rape by talking to 37 young men aged 18 to 25. Researchers used interviews to gather information. They found several important themes about why rapes happen, including: How men think about rape, Sexual restrictions, Male dominance, Influence of Western culture, Lack of social support, Exploitation, Views on laws, Psychological impacts, Childhood trauma. The study highlighted several social and cultural reasons that might lead to sexual violence against women, the psychological effects of rape on victims, and how societal norms

may contribute to more sexual assaults. The findings aim to help develop social programs to reduce the occurrence of rape in the country.

Some respondents believe that in Indian culture, it is uncommon to admit when one is wrong, particularly on topics such as sex or rape. This cultural tendency leads many people to live with misconceptions instead of seeking accurate information, thereby increasing the likelihood of criminal acts against women, including rape. A general lack of awareness is seen as a major contributing factor. As participant AF, age 23, stated, "Indians lack the awareness to understand when things like this are wrong. India is not rape tolerant, but it lacks the courage and awareness to bring it out."

Participant VP, age 22, echoed this sentiment, saying, "In India, I have realized that a lack of knowledge about sex is prevalent. Rapes happen mostly because of this lack of awareness and education about sex."

Regarding misinformation, respondents noted that children who are not properly informed about sex will often turn to unreliable sources. AA, age 20, said, "Parents educated me about this. I've received both accurate and inaccurate information from various sources, but knowing the right facts helped me understand what not to do."

AF, age 24, added, "Sex education helps define the difference between consent, exploitation, and abuse." Participants explained that rapists often have extreme or violent fantasies about sexual activities, stemming from a lack of proper knowledge about intercourse and consent.

AF, age 24, noted, "They may watch extremely deviant porn...forbidden content must be arousing for rapists." SK, age 23, added, "I read a news article where a man and woman

stabbed each other for pleasure...they experienced arousal. I think they find it attractive and explorative."

Participants also believe that males develop a dominant attitude from childhood, with gender-specific power differences starting in the home, and that the culture and its unwritten norms are the foundation of these attitudes.

One participant stated, "One reason for rape is to show dominance. Society views women as inferior, so males may feel the need to assert their dominance over females. Males always think women are inferior to them. They think they are dominant. So they commit rape maybe to prove their dominance over females" (SCS, 19).

Another participant, HPT, 23, shared a similar view: "Western countries always have a genuine attitude. They respect women and care for them. But in Indian culture, the respecting and caring mentality is less."

The responses indicated that in Indian culture, women are generally placed in a subordinate position compared to men and considered the weaker sex. Some men are inclined to maintain the belief that they can exert power over women, and they see forceful sexual intercourse as a way to demonstrate this power and dominance, as suggested by participants in the study.

Participants believed that women adopting Western culture could trigger sexual assaults. Imitating Western trends has been identified as a factor influencing men's sexual desires, as one participant noted.

"Nowadays we started imitating other foreign countries" (HPT, 23 years). Another participant shared a similar view, "I think that's where the difference between Indian and

Western culture matters. Indian people are not used to seeing revealing clothes. I won't say it's provocative, but that might be a reason for some people to develop such thoughts because they haven't seen it before. In foreign countries, they are free to wear whatever they wish, and they see it from their childhood. We are not like that. When we see this for the first time, anyone can have this tendency. But in my opinion, people who get tempted by a girl's dressing style lack a good personality" (P, 21).

According to some participants, adopting Western clothing, which they view as revealing, inappropriate, and provocative, can incite sexual tendencies in men, potentially leading to rape.

The main theme emerged from participants' responses about the *laissez-faire* parenting style, where parents remain uninvolved and permissive regarding their children's actions. Some participants believed this often leads to undesirable behaviors that persist into adulthood. Without guidance and instruction on healthy behaviors, children fail to learn to avoid actions that harm others.

"Generally, I feel that if a child does not receive proper care and guidance, they may end up committing crimes like rape. It's a broad generalization, but the issue lies with the majority. I've seen people go down the wrong path because they don't receive enough care from their families. Parents should monitor their child's daily activities, know where they are going, who they are meeting, and what their friends are like. Everything should be looked into" (SS, 22).

Participants suggested that the persistent issue of increasing brutal rapes in the country stems from ineffective punishment methods. This, coupled with the themes of exploitation and personal revenge, led to the conclusion that offenders are typically aware of their actions

and unafraid of the consequences. One participant stated, "I don't know the reasons behind the rise or onset of sexual abuse, but I do know that none of it would have occurred if the law provided assurance to the people and a warning to these offenders" (APR, 23). Participants also noted that "The Indian judiciary has enough loopholes for a culprit to evade accusations, regardless of the crime. The judicial system takes a long time to deliver punishments, increasing the likelihood of escaping from crime. This motivates them to commit the crime" (SS, 22).

Discussing the Psychological impacts of the survivors, Participants indicated that shame prevents many survivors from speaking out about their experiences. Rape survivors often feel guilty because they believe they did something wrong that led to their assault. Shame, being more enduring and ultimately more dangerous than guilt, has a profound impact. Participant P remarked, "The girl will become less social afterward and feel ashamed and guilty for tarnishing her family's reputation. She might suffer from isolation." Another participant added, "The physical pain will subside in a few months. However, if something happens to a girl now, it spreads quickly through social media, and everyone will know, subjecting her to mental torment. That isolation causes her more problems" (AA, 21 years).

A common psychological reaction observed in rape survivors is the emergence of unwelcome fears and phobias linked to the traumatic event. The study participants shared their perspectives on the repercussions of such trauma. One respondent, DT, expressed, "Continuous and recurring nightmares... If it happened to my sister, I can't even imagine... As a brother, I would have to witness her constant panic, blaming herself for something that was never her fault... I can envision her becoming fearful of men, given her delicate nature... She may lose herself..."

"If she encounters someone resembling the assailant, it could trigger her... Fear looms large..." (AA, 25). Additionally, depressive feelings, heightened anger, and increased aggression stemming from self-blame, fear, and guilt were mentioned as common psychological experiences among rape survivors.

The participants assert that thoughts of suicide often arise as a result of rape, particularly when survivors feel overwhelmed by the emotional trauma. One participant remarked, "She will feel guilty about bringing shame to her family in front of others. Unable to handle the stress and resentment, she may attempt suicide. Depression will likely follow."

Participants highlighted that rape can significantly disrupt an individual's life, affecting their ability to concentrate and perform effectively at work or in studies. One participant expressed, "If the survivor is a student, their academic performance may suffer. Similarly, if they are employed, their work may become less focused."

"Memories of the trauma may resurface frequently, making it difficult for them to work effectively. This could result in them leaving their job or being terminated by their employer" (SK, 23).

Some participants discussed the impact of rape by an intimate partner, noting that it can lead to feelings of distrust and constant worry, affecting the survivor's ability to perform well at work. "If a husband rapes his wife, she may struggle to trust anyone. This could result in decreased productivity at work or taking frequent leave out of fear, which could ultimately lead to termination" (AF, 24).

Participants also mentioned the financial implications of rape, including a decrease in annual income and other financial losses experienced by the survivor.

The study findings underscore the significant influence of socio-cultural factors in shaping negative attitudes, misconceptions, and the normalization of violent tendencies against women among young males. It elucidates how societal and cultural norms contribute to the psychological challenges faced by rape survivors. Despite efforts to promote gender equity, women disproportionately bear the burden of sexual violence, facing suppression at various levels and often being blamed for the actions of others. The participants noted that lack of awareness, negative attitudes towards certain relationships, and misconceptions about women's needs can lead to unwelcome sexual behaviors or harassment. Ambiguous laws regarding sexual expression, combined with societal taboos and stigma, exacerbate the problem. In a male-dominated society where men often dictate women's needs, women's clothing and behavior are sometimes viewed as provocative, particularly when they diverge from traditional norms. Substance abuse, problematic parenting styles, and misuse of power by social institutions like religion also contribute to the prevalence of rape. Psychological factors associated with rape include unmet sexual needs, poor emotional regulation, distorted attraction to women, and dysfunctional psychological patterns, often stemming from childhood trauma. Many of these factors are exacerbated by societal restrictions on natural sexual expression. Rape victims often experience social withdrawal, shame, fear, low self-esteem, emotional instability, reduced productivity, and even suicidal thoughts. However, the study suggests a growing empathy among men towards female victims of crime and a willingness to understand the underlying factors contributing to these crimes.

CHAPTER-3

Empowerment frameworks in the novel, Alaisri

Empowerment, especially when considered in the context of surviving and overcoming the profound trauma associated with rape, is an intricate, deeply personal journey that involves the reclamation of one's sense of self, agency, and control over one's own life. At its very essence, empowerment signifies a transformation from a state of intense vulnerability and victimization to one of formidable strength, resilience, and self-determination. This transformative process spans multiple dimensions including psychological, social, economic, legal, health, and cultural facets. Psychologically, it requires therapeutic interventions designed to help survivors process their trauma, rebuild their self-esteem, and develop effective coping mechanisms. Counseling, support groups, and self-help strategies such as mindfulness, meditation, and journaling are crucial in this regard, as they provide survivors with the means to articulate and process their emotions, thereby fostering a sense of mental and emotional stability. Socially, empowerment demands the establishment of a supportive network comprised of family, friends, and community resources. Engaging in support groups can offer validation and a sense of solidarity, while community resources like crisis centers provide indispensable legal, medical, and emotional support. Advocacy and public awareness campaigns amplify this social dimension by enabling survivors to transform their personal experiences into catalysts for societal change, thereby reclaiming their voices and contributing to the prevention of future violence.

Economic empowerment constitutes another essential pillar, as financial independence and stability are crucial for survivors striving to rebuild their lives. Access to

job training, career counseling, and educational opportunities can greatly enhance a survivor's capacity for economic self-reliance, equipping them with the tools necessary to secure stable employment and achieve financial security. Economic resources, including financial assistance and housing support, alleviate immediate pressures and enable survivors to focus on their long-term recovery and personal development. Legally, empowerment involves navigating the justice system with the aid of legal support and advocacy services. These services help survivors understand their rights, pursue justice, and obtain protective measures that are vital for their safety and peace of mind. The realm of health and well-being is equally vital, encompassing both immediate medical care and long-term health support. Access to sexual assault forensic exams, reproductive health services, and mental health care ensures that survivors receive comprehensive care addressing both physical and psychological needs. Holistic health approaches such as nutrition, exercise, and alternative therapies like yoga and acupuncture further bolster the overall well-being and resilience of survivors. On a personal level, empowerment is about rebuilding self-worth and reclaiming control over one's life. This involves practicing self-compassion, setting healthy boundaries, and pursuing personal goals and aspirations. Activities that focus on strengths, achievements, and positive affirmations can reinforce a survivor's sense of capability and self-worth. Cultural and community dimensions also play a significant role, with culturally competent support services and community engagement helping to fortify identity and a sense of belonging. In summary, empowerment is a comprehensive, multifaceted process requiring a supportive and holistic approach to enable survivors to reclaim their lives, restore their sense of self, and advance with strength and resilience. Each survivor's path to empowerment is unique, necessitating a variety of tools and approaches to meet their individual needs and foster a deeply personal and transformative sense of empowerment.

Empowerment following rape is depicted as a journey imbued with resilience and strength, often articulated through the protagonist's narrative in literature. Through the protagonist's experience, the multifaceted dimensions of empowerment, encompassing psychological, social, legal, and personal facets, come to light. Readers are immersed in the protagonist's transformation from a state of vulnerability to one of empowerment, shedding light on the intricacies and obstacles encountered in the process of healing and reclaiming agency post-trauma.

In the novel *Alaisri*, Alaisri, the protagonist emerges as a beacon of resilience and inner strength amidst adversity. Alaisri's character exudes a remarkable fortitude that is palpable to those around her. Even in the face of daunting challenges, she refuses to succumb to despair, displaying an unwavering determination to persevere. It's as though she possesses an indomitable force within her, propelling her to confront obstacles head-on. Alaisri's resilience is unmistakable, serving as a testament to her remarkable inner resilience and fortitude.

Through the lens of "*Alaisri*," readers gain invaluable insights into the impact of trauma on individuals and their journey towards healing and empowerment. Manaranjan Lahary intricately portrays the raw emotions and struggles faced by survivors, illustrating the arduous path towards recovery. However, amidst the darkness, the novel also illuminates the strength and resilience inherent in survivors like Alaisri as they navigate the complexities of trauma and reclaim agency over their lives. Through Alaisri's narrative, Lahary showcases the resilience and determination of survivors, inspiring hope and highlighting the transformative power of resilience in the face of adversity.

Alaisri, in a bold move that defied societal norms, unilaterally decided during a meeting between New Titaguri and Old Titaguri villages that Malen should marry her or face

the consequence of her marrying him instead. This audacious decision was not merely aimed at breaking societal conventions or seeking retribution through legal punishment; rather, it was a deliberate challenge against the prevailing patriarchal attitudes that perceive women as weak. In her action, Alaisri exhibited two underlying objectives: to mete out justice to her rapist and to assert the inherent strength and resilience of women.

In a society where rape survivors are often marginalized and ostracized, Alaisri's decision to confront her perpetrator through marriage was a radical act of defiance. She understood the lasting impact of the trauma she endured, symbolized by the unyielding stain on her psyche, akin to Lady Macbeth's lament in Shakespeare's play about the inability to cleanse one's conscience. Despite the impossibility of erasing the trauma from her body, Alaisri refused to succumb to victimhood. Instead, she demonstrated remarkable strength and determination, encapsulated in her resolve expressed to her confidante Rosy: "I will fight to the last." Aale's declaration, "I will fight to the last," encapsulates her unwavering resolve and commitment to persist despite any adversities. This assertion underscores her determination to endure until the end, showcasing her readiness to confront challenges with courage and resilience. It reflects her strong resolve and refusal to yield, illustrating her preparedness to exert utmost effort in pursuit of her goals or convictions. Ultimately, Aale's statement reaffirms her unwavering courage and determination to confront whatever obstacles may arise.

In choosing to confront her rapist and assert her agency, Alaisri emerged victorious in her personal battle, proving herself to be a formidable force to be reckoned with. Her actions serve as a powerful testament to the resilience and unwavering spirit of survivors, challenging societal perceptions and advocating for the empowerment of women. "The perpetrator who violated me and shattered my life, the one who drained the essence from blossoming flowers

and left wilted, must marry me. If he refuses, I will pursue him relentlessly; indeed, I myself will marry him. This is my final decision, and I will not budge from this decision again.”

(Page No. 110) Aale's statement carries profound weight, revealing her unwavering determination to seek justice and reclaim control of her life following a traumatic violation.

Here's a breakdown of her intentions:

1. **Demanding Accountability:** Aale insists that the perpetrator, who shattered her life, must marry her. This demand signifies her quest for accountability and restitution from the individual responsible for her suffering. By requiring marriage, she aims to confront the perpetrator with the consequences of their actions and ensure they take responsibility.
2. **Reclaiming Agency:** Aale asserts her agency by declaring her intent to relentlessly pursue the perpetrator and marry them if necessary. This proclamation symbolizes her refusal to be passive in the face of victimization, demonstrating her determination to regain power and autonomy despite the trauma she has endured.
3. **Emphasizing Resolution:** Aale's statement emphasizes her resolute stance, declaring that her decision is final and unyielding. It reflects her careful consideration of her options and her steadfast commitment to pursuing this course of action, regardless of challenges or opposition.

In essence, Aale's words signify her refusal to accept victimhood or remain silent in the aftermath of her trauma. Instead, she asserts her right to seek justice, reclaim control, and shape her own destiny, showcasing resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

Socially, the protagonist's empowerment is intricately linked with their capacity to forge supportive connections and reclaim a sense of belonging. Family, friends, and community resources emerge as pivotal sources of validation, solidarity, and tangible aid. Leading

advocacy and public awareness campaigns, the protagonist amplifies their voice and contributes to societal transformation by challenging prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding sexual violence. By sharing their narrative and advocating for justice, the protagonist not only seeks personal healing but also becomes a catalyst for broader societal change. Alaisri was reassured by her parents, who encouraged her not to worry, insisting that everything would be all right. She also received support from her relatives and the villagers. Her best friend Rosie motivated her, saying, "Your thoughts are misguided, Aale. Why do you dwell so deeply on this incident? There may be students who have endured worse or made greater mistakes, yet they didn't abandon their studies. Perhaps they don't overthink it and continue attending college regularly." Rosie added, "I tell you, Aale, your future career is not destroyed and will not be destroyed. You are blaming yourself because of the sorrow in your heart." Alaisri was fortified by her friend's encouragement to persist in attending classes and engaging in other activities. Rosie's statement to Aale is meant to offer reassurance and perspective regarding an incident that Aale is deeply troubled by. Here's a breakdown of what Rosie means:

1. **Putting the Incident in Perspective:** By suggesting that Aale's thoughts are misguided, Rosie is encouraging Aale to reconsider the significance of the incident. She implies that while Aale is fixating on this event, it might not be as catastrophic as Aale perceives.
2. **Comparing to Others' Experiences:** Rosie mentions that other students might have faced worse situations or made bigger mistakes but continued with their studies. This comparison is meant to show that Aale is not alone in facing challenges and that others have managed to move past their difficulties without abandoning their education.

3. **Avoiding Overthinking:** Rosie suggests that these other students might not dwell on their issues as much, which allows them to continue attending college regularly. She implies that Aale might benefit from adopting a similar mindset, focusing less on the incident and more on moving forward.
4. **Reassurance about the Future:** Rosie reassures Aale that their future career is not and will not be destroyed by this incident. She emphasizes that Aale's perception of the incident's impact on her future is likely exaggerated due to current feelings of sorrow and self-blame.
5. **Addressing Self-Blame:** By stating that Aale is blaming herself because of the sorrow in their heart, Rosie is acknowledging Aale's emotional pain and suggesting that this emotional state is clouding her judgment. She encourages Aale to see the situation more objectively and to be kinder to herself.

In essence, Rosie's words are meant to comfort Aale, helping her see that the incident is not as detrimental as she believe and encouraging her to adopt a more balanced and forgiving perspective on her situation.

Alaisri responded to Rosie that she had made a different decision. She would not participate in a college competition but would take on a more formidable challenge. She replied, "I thought long and hard and finally decided to take on a challenge. Men think women are weak. A woman's body may be soft and smooth, but her heart is as hard as a steel rod." She added, "You will understand later, my friend. Only I know the fire that burns within me, in my body, my soul, my organs. I can't conceal this volcano; I will definitely pursue what I desire." Alaisri, despite enduring trauma and pain, emerged strong and resolute. Ignoring her suffering, she decided to confront her challenges head-on, particularly against the rapists. She didn't hesitate to take on this challenge. Aale's words powerfully convey her

inner strength and determination as a survivor. Here's an interpretation of what she means by this statement:

1. **Acknowledging Stereotypes:** By stating that men think women are weak, Aale, recognizes the prevalent stereotype that women are fragile and incapable of enduring hardship. This stereotype often underestimates women's resilience and strength.
2. **Contrasting Physicality with Inner Strength:** She contrasts the softness and smoothness of a woman's body with the hardness of her heart, symbolizing the internal fortitude that women possess. This suggests that despite outward appearances, her inner strength is unbreakable, comparable to a steel rod.
3. **Expressing Inner Fire and Determination:** Aale speaks of a fire that burns within her body, soul, and organs, indicating a deep-seated passion and drive. This metaphorical fire represents her determination and unyielding spirit, forged through her experiences as a survivor.
4. **Emphasizing Unconcealable Strength:** She mentions that she cannot conceal this volcano within her, implying that her strength and desire to pursue her goals are so intense that they cannot be hidden or suppressed. This reflects her readiness to act on her convictions and aspirations, regardless of the obstacles she faces.
5. **Pursuing Desires and Goals:** Aale's declaration that she will definitely pursue what she desires showcases her commitment to taking control of her life and seeking her goals with unwavering resolve. It highlights her proactive stance in shaping her future despite past traumas.

In summary, Aale's statement reflects her recognition of societal stereotypes, her acknowledgment of her own inner strength, and her unrelenting determination to follow her desires and assert her agency. It encapsulates the resilience and courage that define her as a

survivor, emphasizing that her experiences have only strengthened her resolve to live life on her own terms.

After successfully marrying her rapist, Malen, Alaisri, known as Aale, faced relentless torment from her father-in-law, Badal Mahajan, and her husband's brother's wife or sister-in-law, Durjang. Badal Mahajan held Durjang in high esteem and frequently collaborated with her to devise schemes against Aale. Both acted as antagonists in the novel, seizing every opportunity to torment and berate her. Despite being treated like a servant and relegated to living in a servant's quarters, Aale steadfastly asserted her identity as a daughter-in-law, responding to their abuses with resilience and defiance.

Durjang, though a woman herself, showed no empathy towards Aale's plight, harboring a persistent desire to see her demise. Her cruelty was fueled by selfish motives concerning the inheritance of Badal Mahajan's property. Durjang harbored ambitions of bringing her own sister into the family, hoping to marry her off to Aale's husband, Malen. This scheme was driven by Durjang's desire to consolidate her power and maximize her share of the inheritance, ensuring her dominance over the family's wealth. Unwilling to share the property, Durjang resorted to deceitful and malicious tactics, showing no regard for Aale's suffering or dignity.

When Aale moved to another room, both her sister-in-law and father-in-law confronted her, asking who gave her permission to shift rooms and calling her a bitch. She replied, "I am not a bitch, Father. Your son left a scar on my body. If not for that, I wouldn't have come here to be your daughter-in-law. And you are concerned about permission? A daughter-in-law doesn't need permission from anyone. If your first daughter-in-law, my sister, can stay on the first floor, why can't I? There's an empty room sitting unused. To share

a bed with your son, my common sense tells me I have done nothing wrong in taking this room."

Aale's response reveals the struggles and indignities she has faced as a woman survivor of abuse, likely inflicted by her husband. Her defiance in moving to another room and her assertive reply highlight several key points:

1. **Assertion of Dignity:** By stating "I am not a bitch," Aale reclaims her dignity in the face of derogatory accusations. She refuses to be demeaned by the insults from her in-laws, asserting her self-worth and rejecting the dehumanizing labels imposed on her.
2. **Revealing Abuse:** Her mention of a scar left by their son is a poignant revelation of the abuse she has suffered. This scar symbolizes the physical and emotional pain she has endured, and she uses it to expose the truth about her husband's behavior to his family.
3. **Challenging Authority:** Aale questions the arbitrary authority her in-laws wield over her by stating that a daughter-in-law doesn't need permission to make decisions about her living arrangements. This challenges the traditional, patriarchal norms that often restrict women's autonomy.
4. **Seeking Equality:** By comparing her situation to that of her sister-in-law, who resides on the first floor, Aale highlights the inconsistency and unfairness in how she is treated. She demands equal treatment and respect within the household.
5. **Common Sense and Personal Agency:** Aale uses common sense as a rationale for her actions, emphasizing her right to make decisions for her well-being. She implies that it is reasonable and just for her to seek a safer, more comfortable living environment, especially given her husband's abusive behavior.

In summary, Aale's response is a powerful assertion of her rights and humanity in the face of mistreatment. It underscores her resilience and courage as a survivor, as she confronts her oppressors and demands the respect and autonomy she deserves. Her words challenge entrenched patriarchal norms and highlight the necessity for empathy and justice in familial relationships.

Aale receives no affection from her husband, Malen. There is a complete lack of communication between them, and she never knows where he disappears to for days on end. This constant uncertainty causes her great anxiety. Aale attempts to converse with Malen, but he persistently ignores her. Despite their marriage, Malen's behavior remains unchanged. Aale reflects, "What did I see in him, and what have I gained from marrying him? What qualities does he possess? He has neither good character, nor education, nor striking looks. Yet, I still married him—I had to marry him. The reason I chose him as my husband is simple: who would be the father of my child if not Malen, once his baby is born? Why would another man take responsibility for my child? How could a stepfather truly accept and love a child as his own? And abortion? That is a grave sin. There is no greater crime than destroying God's creation. When humans cannot create even a single blade of grass, they have no right to destroy what God has made." Aale's reflection reveals her profound frustration and disillusionment with her marriage to Malen. She questions her decision to marry him, noting his lack of good character, education, and physical attractiveness. Despite these shortcomings, she felt obligated to marry him for the sake of her unborn child.

Aale's reasoning is rooted in the belief that no other man would willingly take on the responsibility of raising another man's child, and that a stepfather might not fully accept or love the child as his own. She sees abortion as morally unacceptable, viewing it as a grave sin and an unjust destruction of God's creation. Aale believes that since humans cannot create

life, they have no right to destroy it. This belief solidified her decision to marry Malen, as she felt it was the only way to ensure her child's future well-being and legitimacy.

Subsequently, Aale is beaten by her father-in-law, Durjang, who accuses her of stealing his alcohol. In truth, Durjang herself placed the bottle in Alai's room to frame her and consumed all of it herself. When her cousin Arun visited Alai to check on her, he learned about the whipping incident. Fearing for her life, he offered her their Grandpa Aanda's amulet for protection, promising it would keep her safe. However, Aale replied, "No need, brother. If I keep my heart pure and resolute, they won't be able to harm me. If they try to take my life, God will save me." Aale's response reflects her strong faith and inner resolve. By saying, she means that she believes in the power of maintaining a pure heart and a determined spirit. She trusts that her moral integrity and unwavering faith in God will protect her from harm. Aale is confident that if anyone attempts to end her life, divine intervention will save her. This statement highlights her reliance on spiritual strength rather than physical objects for protection.

Durjang and her father-in-law attempted to kill Aale by poisoning her milk, but their plan failed. Even Malen tried to stab her with a knife, but upon seeing her pregnant belly, he couldn't go through with it. Consequently, Durjang ordered the serpent of time (Kaal Sarp) to be brought in to bite Aale. As a result, Malen was bitten by the snake when he went to check if Aale had died after hearing her scream, thinking the snake had bitten her. However, the snake did not bite her; she had fainted upon seeing it. Malen collapsed near Aale, and she rescued him by tightly tying a cloth around the bite area to block the poison. Malen then realized that the woman he had scolded was now his rescuer. Aale's kindness prevailed. Malen apologized for his mistakes and for the torment he inflicted on Aale, including rape. He began to genuinely love Aale. Badal, who had been anticipating Aale's

demise, was shocked to see them embracing, indicating their reconciliation and deepening bond of love. Fueled by anger and frustration over their successful union thwarting his plans, Badal grappled with what to do next. In a fit of rage, he found a bottle and struck Aale with it three or four times. Aale fell to the ground and was promptly rushed to the hospital for medical attention.

Badal realized the enormity of his mistake. Overwhelmed by guilt, he muttered to himself, "I am a sinner, a fraud, a thief, a liar, a gambler, an antisocial individual. I committed a grave error by tormenting my kind and innocent daughter-in-law." Consumed by self-condemnation, he concluded that as a sinner, he had no purpose in continuing to live. With a gun in hand, he shot himself in the chest and collapsed onto the floor. Badal committed suicide due to a combination of overwhelming guilt, remorse, and the realization of the grave mistakes he had made. He recognized the severity of his actions, including mistreating his kind and innocent daughter-in-law. Overwhelmed by self-condemnation and feeling that his sins had rendered him worthless, Badal concluded that he had no purpose in continuing to live. This intense internal struggle led him to take his own life as a tragic and final act of remorse and despair. On the other hand, Durjang was bitten by her husband, Ramnath, and was instructed to leave his house along with her sister. Aale's life is now peaceful, and she has emerged victorious.

Aale's victory and empowerment stem from her resilience, courage, and ability to overcome adversity. Despite enduring mistreatment, abuse, and attempts on her life, Aale remains steadfast in her resolve to stand up for herself and protect her well-being. By refusing to succumb to fear or despair, she asserts her agency and refuses to be a victim of circumstances.

Aale's victory lies in her ability to break free from toxic relationships and oppressive situations. She confronts her oppressors, including her abusive husband and manipulative relatives, and ultimately gains her freedom. Her decision to prioritize her own safety and happiness demonstrates her inner strength and self-worth.

Furthermore, Aale's empowerment is evident in her ability to advocate for herself and assert her rights. She refuses to accept mistreatment or injustice, demanding respect and dignity in all aspects of her life. Through her actions, she inspires others and becomes a symbol of resilience and empowerment for those who have faced similar challenges.

Overall, Aale's victory and empowerment are rooted in her ability to overcome adversity, assert her agency, and reclaim control over her own life. She serves as a powerful example of resilience, courage, and self-determination in the face of adversity.

On a personal level, the protagonist's empowerment is marked by their journey towards self-compassion, self-worth, and reclaiming control over their life. Setting boundaries, practicing self-care, and pursuing personal goals and aspirations become instrumental in their healing process. Activities that focus on strengths, achievements, and positive affirmations reinforce the protagonist's sense of capability and self-worth, enabling them to envision a future defined by their own agency and resilience.

The empowerment of rape survivors represents a profound journey characterized by resilience, solidarity, and transformative change. At its core is the acknowledgment and validation of survivor agency, recognizing each individual's unique path towards healing and recovery. Key to this empowerment is the courageous act of breaking the silence surrounding sexual violence, allowing survivors to reclaim control over their narratives and challenge the societal norms that perpetuate shame and stigma.

The significance of community support networks and advocacy efforts cannot be overstated in this journey. Whether through professional counseling, peer support groups, or grassroots activism, these initiatives provide survivors with essential resources, validation, and solidarity, creating an environment conducive to healing and growth. Simultaneously, the pursuit of legal and social justice plays a crucial role in holding perpetrators accountable and addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate sexual violence.

Holistic healing and self-care are integral aspects of survivor empowerment, prioritizing the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of survivors. Through practices such as therapy and self-care, survivors cultivate resilience and find inner strength to navigate their journey towards healing. Additionally, challenging and reshaping cultural narratives surrounding rape and sexual assault is essential, requiring the dismantling of victim-blaming attitudes and the promotion of a culture rooted in consent, respect, and empathy.

The journey of empowerment for rape survivors is ongoing and multifaceted, demanding sustained advocacy and support. By amplifying survivors' voices, advocating for systemic change, and fostering a culture of empathy and accountability, we can collectively strive towards a world where all individuals can live without fear of sexual violence. In this vision, survivors are empowered to reclaim their lives with dignity, agency, and the unwavering support of their communities.

In "Alaisri," the journey of empowerment for the protagonist, Alaisri, as a survivor, culminates in a powerful conclusion that showcases her resilience, strength, and growth. Throughout the novel, Alaisri faces numerous challenges and obstacles, including trauma, oppression, and societal expectations. However, as the narrative progresses, she gradually learns to reclaim her agency, voice, and identity.

The conclusion of Alaisri's empowerment journey sees her breaking free from the constraints imposed upon her by society and embracing her true self. She no longer allows herself to be defined by her past traumas or the expectations of others. Instead, she finds the courage to confront her demons, confront her oppressors, and chart her own path forward.

Through her experiences and struggles, Alaisri emerges as a beacon of hope and inspiration for others who have faced similar adversity. Her journey serves as a testament to the power of resilience, self-discovery, and the ability to rise above even the darkest of circumstances.

Ultimately, the conclusion of "Alaisri" celebrates Alaisri's triumph over adversity and her transformation into a confident, empowered survivor who refuses to be silenced or diminished by her past. It is a testament to the human spirit's capacity for growth, healing, and renewal, even in the face of unimaginable hardship.

CHAPTER-4

CONCLUSION

Alaisri's journey in the novel serves as a powerful symbol of women's empowerment, illustrating the transformative potential inherent in resilience and agency. From the outset, Alaisri confronts formidable challenges, navigating the complexities of trauma, societal expectations, and oppressive patriarchal structures. However, it is through her unwavering determination and unwavering spirit that she emerges as a beacon of empowerment, inspiring both characters within the narrative and readers beyond its pages.

Central to Alaisri's empowerment is the recognition of intersectionality—the understanding that women's experiences are shaped by intersecting identities such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Her story sheds light on the nuances of intersectional feminism, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches to empowerment that acknowledge and address the unique struggles faced by marginalized women.

Throughout her journey, Alaisri boldly challenges patriarchal norms and expectations, refusing to be confined by the limitations imposed upon her by society. In doing so, she not only asserts her own agency but also catalyzes broader societal transformation, prompting reflection and action among those around her.

Crucially, Alaisri's empowerment is nurtured by the bonds of sisterhood and solidarity she shares with other women. Whether as mentors, allies, or friends, these relationships provide her with strength, support, and a sense of community, underscoring the importance of collective action in fostering empowerment.

As Alaisri's story unfolds, it becomes evident that women's empowerment is not merely an individual journey but a collective endeavor—one that requires collaboration, understanding, and mutual upliftment. Through her resilience, courage, and unwavering commitment to justice, Alaisri inspires hope for a future where all women can thrive, free from the constraints of patriarchy and oppression. Her story serves as a testament to the transformative power of empowerment, reminding us of the limitless potential inherent in every woman's journey towards self-discovery and liberation.

Using reader response theory to craft a conclusion for women's empowerment through the lens of the novel "Alaisri" invites us to consider the diverse interpretations and personal connections readers may have with the text. Here's a possible conclusion:

In reflecting on "Alaisri" through the lens of reader response theory, it becomes evident that the novel serves as a powerful catalyst for discussions surrounding women's empowerment. Through the varied responses and interpretations of readers, we witness the richness and complexity of Alaisri's journey, as well as the broader themes of resilience, agency, and societal transformation.

For some readers, Alaisri's story may resonate as a deeply personal narrative of survival and self-discovery. Through their own experiences and perspectives, they may find parallels with Alaisri's struggles and triumphs, drawing inspiration from her resilience and determination to overcome adversity. In this way, the novel becomes a mirror reflecting their own journeys of empowerment and resilience.

Other readers may engage with "Alaisri" as a thought-provoking exploration of societal norms and power dynamics. Through their readings, they may interrogate the patriarchal structures and systemic injustices that shape Alaisri's world, drawing connections

to contemporary issues surrounding gender inequality and women's rights. By engaging critically with the text, they contribute to ongoing conversations about gender, power, and social change.

Moreover, reader response theory highlights the active role of readers in constructing meaning from the text. Each interpretation, whether shared in discussion groups or contemplated in solitude, contributes to the collective understanding of "Alaisri" and its themes of women's empowerment. Through dialogue and exchange, readers enrich their perspectives and deepen their appreciation for the complexities of Alaisri's journey.

Ultimately, "Alaisri" invites readers to engage with its narrative on multiple levels, fostering empathy, introspection, and dialogue. By embracing the diverse responses and interpretations it elicits, the novel becomes a catalyst for personal and collective reflection on the challenges and possibilities of women's empowerment. In this way, it transcends its role as a work of fiction, emerging as a powerful tool for social critique, dialogue, and transformation.

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